

# Masood Akhtar and Mike McCabe: 12 steps to strike hate at its roots

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There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.

American journalist and poet Henry David Thoreau wrote those words more than a century and a half ago. They still speak volumes about what's happening in our country today.

We're seeing one mass shooting after another. Relentless scapegoating and demonizing of immigrants. Ugly racist incidents and domestic terrorism by white supremacists. There's been a 20% increase in the number of hate groups in America just since 2014. Some politicians call for gun control. Others say no, the focus needs to be on mental health treatment. Still others say no, something needs to be done about video games. They end up doing nothing. They are all hacking at branches, no one is striking at the roots.

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Make no mistake, Congress and the president should take action dealing with gun violence, and so should the states, starting with measures that have overwhelming public support like universal criminal background checks, red flag laws, gun licensing, limiting the size of ammunition clips and raising the legal purchasing age to 21. Such steps are necessary but not sufficient. They do not get to the root of hate.

Capitol Hill is now preoccupied with whether to impeach the president. Meanwhile, the flames of division, fear and hate burn more and more intensely. It's important to

recognize that the president didn't start the fire. He fans the flames, he pours gasoline on the blaze, he exploits it for his own political gain. But the fire was already burning before he got to the White House. It's a big reason why he's in the White House.

Hate and violence do not have a single cause. There is not a single branch to cut. We have to strike at the roots. Many who struggle with addiction to alcohol have found the strength to conquer this demon in a 12-step program. Given America's powerful addiction to hate and violence, our country could use a 12-step program to beat that addiction. We Are Many United Against Hate recommends these 12 steps:

1. Relieve economic stress.
2. Reconnect with nature.
3. Destigmatize and decriminalize mental health.
4. Incarcerate less, educate more.
5. Demilitarize immigration.
6. Administer a prescription-strength dose of democracy.
7. Teach civics.
8. Talk about religion and politics.
9. Recommit to the First Amendment's separation of church and state.
10. Dedicate to inclusive communities.
11. Unite around a shared national purpose.
12. Practice common decency.

More details on what each step entails and why it's needed can be found at [united-against-hate.org/a-12-step-program-to-kick-americas-addiction-to-hate-and-violence/](https://united-against-hate.org/a-12-step-program-to-kick-americas-addiction-to-hate-and-violence/)

America's addiction to hate and violence is deeply rooted. One of the roots is economic insecurity and inequality. Some of the roots have to do with mental health challenges and make the need to overhaul both the health care and criminal justice systems painfully apparent. Some of the needed root striking involves personal soul searching, some involves changing what schools are doing, some requires fixing our democracy. Immigration reform is part of the answer. Protecting nature and getting outdoors more is another part of it. Responding to the climate emergency positively can be a powerful way to deal with growing hate and violence if we can unite behind this effort as a common national aim.

Hate and the violence it frequently produces is an illness, not unlike alcoholism.

Twelve steps can get us to wellness.

*-Masood Akhtar is the founder and president of We Are Many United Against Hate. Mike McCabe is the group's executive director. The website is [united-against-hate.org](http://united-against-hate.org).*